RAISING HIGHER:

OneGW's PATH to PREEMINENCE

Working Group on Academic and Career Advising

Final Report

Fall 2026

CO-CHAIRS

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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

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Charge

The Academic and Career Advising Working Group is charged with developing recommendations to strengthen coordination between academic advising and career advising across the university, ensuring that these functions work together more intentionally to support students throughout their academic journey, and identifying opportunities to expand and enhance the offerings provided through both academic and career advising in order to improve the overall student experience and increase student success outcomes. This includes considering new or expanded programs, tools, and practices that help students make informed decisions, progress efficiently toward graduation, and prepare effectively for post-graduate pathways, while recognizing differences across schools and programs and promoting scalable, institution-wide best practices.

Executive Summary

This work builds upon priority two of Raising Higher: OneGW's Path to Preeminence, which emphasizes preparing students to be strong and resilient leaders through coordinated support, equitable access to opportunities, and meaningful connections between academic learning and future pathways. The report recommends using this effort to build a new national model of excellence for academic and career advising. The plan should be centered on an integrated, team-based Advising Excellence Model that aligns academic advising, career coaching, experiential learning, and student success while preserving advising's important embeddedness within schools.

At the core of this model is a desire to avoid relying primarily on a single assigned advisor to provide students with an integrated team of academic advisors, career coaches, success coaches, faculty, and alumni who collectively support students throughout their GW experience. This approach is designed to increase meaningful engagement and personalized points of contact, strengthen students' connections to the university, and improve retention, persistence, and post-graduate outcomes across diverse student populations.

The Working Group also calls for strategically embracing emerging technology to enhance students' personal engagements and relationships with their advising team. By reducing transactional and administrative work, simplifying routine processes, assisting with appointment scheduling, and helping students more easily navigate university resources, technology (workflow tech, CRM integrations, AI, etc) should expand the capacity of advisors and coaches to provide more frequent and higher-quality personal interactions. Together, these elements position GW to create a distinctive, relationship-based student support model that improves the student experience and establishes the university as a recognized national leader in integrated academic and career advising.

Between October 2025 and April 2026, the Academic and Career Advising Working Group met seven times as a full working group. The Working Group was Co-chaired by Jay Goff and Paul Wahlbeck, and included representatives from advising, faculty, enrollment, career services, and academic leadership across schools.

The Working Group began by establishing a shared diagnosis of advising challenges at GW and clarifying the group's scope. Discussions centered on student access to advisors, different advising models across schools, high advisor-to-student ratios, and the disconnect students experience between academic planning and career preparation. The group reviewed prior inputs, including the NACADA site visit findings, Innovation Committee insights, and student feedback.

The Working Group then further explored models, tools, and practices that could reduce "transactional" advising, enabling advisors to focus more meaningfully on mentorship and holistic student development. Several external tools and concepts were introduced and discussed, including pathway-mapping and career simulation platforms (e.g., Forage and PeopleGrove), competency frameworks, and early ideas for AI-enabled triage and self-service support. The group participated in various demos and briefings, including presentations on career pathway simulations, competency-based transcripts/portfolios, and the potential role of chatbots in providing 24/7 access to routine information, with clear caution that technology should follow clarity of advising goals and data integration, while also enabling more significant engagement between a student and their advising team.

The Working Group ultimately coalesced around a shared vision for a nationally excellent academic and career advising model grounded in clearly defined student outcomes. This vision reflects the group's consensus that George Washington University must prepare students not only for their first job after graduation, but for a lifetime of evolving career opportunities, challenges, and contributions. The two main objectives are as follows:

A. **Help Students Secure a Meaningful First Post-Graduate Opportunity.** In the near term, success is reflected in a student's ability to secure a meaningful post-graduate opportunity that aligns with their interests, skills, and aspirations. Students must be equipped with the knowledge, experiences, and support necessary to navigate the transition from college to their first role or next step with confidence and clarity.

B. **Equip Students for Sustaining Success Across a Lifetime of Careers.** In the long term, success is reflected in a graduate's ability to navigate change, pursue new opportunities, and sustain a trajectory of growth across an increasingly dynamic and uncertain job market. Students must develop the adaptability, self-awareness, and durable competencies required to evolve across roles, industries, and professional contexts over time.

In response to these objectives, the Working Group identified five broad strategies that define the institutional shift needed to move GW toward a more coherent, developmental, and student-centered model of advising excellence and represent a significant opportunity to strengthen the student experience and student outcomes. These strategies establish the direction for change; the recommended tactics that follow are intended to translate that direction into specific actions the university can take to improve advising structures, strengthen coordination, and enhance the student experience throughout students' academic and professional journeys.

The report's recommendations are organized to distinguish between the actions needed to build a stronger advising foundation and the efforts that can accelerate a more developmental, integrated, and student-centered advising model. Each strategy includes both Foundational Enablers and Transformational Accelerators. Foundational Enablers are the core conditions that must be strengthened early, including advisor capacity, governance, role clarity, systems, and infrastructure. Transformational Accelerators are the programs, pathways, partnerships, and tools that build on those conditions over time and move GW toward a more ambitious advising model.

Among the full set of recommendations, the Working Group strongly recommends that GW prioritize three immediate actions that would make meaningful progress on the first three strategies highlighted in this report: restoring funding, staffing, and infrastructure; shifting advising from a transactional service to a developmental experience; and building a coherent and navigable advising ecosystem. These three priorities address the most pressing structural barriers identified through the Working Group process and would create the conditions needed for future transformational work. Together, they are intended to improve students' ability to access timely support, build meaningful relationships with advisors, and navigate academic and career decisions with greater confidence and clarity.

1. **Improve advising responsiveness and quality through an assessment of current capabilities and the development of a near-term improvement plan.** GW should identify the academic and career advising units experiencing the greatest capacity strain and determine where immediate staffing, caseload rebalancing, or role clarification is needed. This assessment should examine advisor-to-student ratios, actual caseloads, student demand, appointment availability, advisor responsibilities, and the volume of transactional tasks that limit time for developmental advising.

Based on this analysis, GW should develop a near-term staffing stabilization plan that prioritizes the areas of greatest need, clarifies role expectations, and identifies opportunities to rebalance advising responsibilities where possible. This action would provide a concrete first step toward restoring advisor capacity and ensuring that future investments are targeted, evidence-based, and aligned with the goal of delivering more proactive, relationship-centered advising. By addressing advisor capacity constraints, GW can improve access to advising, reduce wait times, and ensure students receive timely support through critical points in their academic and career journeys

2. **Reduce transactional workload through automation, standardized business processes and roles, improved appointment scheduling, and centralized workflows for common activities such as transfer credit and major changes.** Working Group members consistently identified routine administrative tasks as the primary barrier preventing advisors from engaging in meaningful mentoring and developmental conversations with students. These tasks consume disproportionate advisor capacity and create frustration for students when processes are slow or opaque. The goal is not to eliminate human oversight, but to ensure that advisor time is reserved for work that requires judgment, context, and relationship, allowing advising to move beyond transactional interactions toward sustained, student-centered relationships. For students, this would create clearer processes, reduce administrative friction, and allow advisors to spend more time on personalized guidance, academic planning, and career preparation.
3. **Establish a cross-functional Advising Excellence Committee to provide ongoing coordination, shared accountability, and a mechanism for adapting leading practices to GW's academic environment.** Across the Working Group discussions, a consistent theme emerged: GW possesses strong advising practices, but those practices are uneven, siloed, and difficult to sustain at scale. As a result, the student experience can vary significantly across schools and programs. Participants emphasized the need for a durable governance mechanism that can steward an integrated advising model over time. A standing Advising Excellence Committee would provide continuity, shared accountability, and a forum for translating national best practices into approaches that fit GW's decentralized academic structure. The committee would include representation from academic advising, career services, experiential learning, faculty leadership, enrollment, student affairs, and institutional research, and would be charged with synthesizing evidence from national models (e.g., NACADA-informed practices, AAU peers) and adapting them into guidance that departments and schools can implement in ways aligned with their curricula, accreditation requirements, and student populations. The committee would also serve as a clearinghouse for internal best practices, identifying models already working well within GW and supporting their adaptation elsewhere. The committee would be responsible for revisiting recommendations over time, assessing progress, and adjusting guidance as institutional conditions, student expectations, and labor-market dynamics evolve. Ultimately, the committee's goal would be to help ensure a more consistent, coordinated, and high-quality advising experience for all GW students.

CURRENT STATE OF ACADEMIC AND CAREER ADVISING AT GW

Advising Definitions at GW

Academic Advising

Academic advising supports students' progress toward degree completion through guidance on degree requirements, course selection, academic policies, registration, and academic planning. At GW, academic advising is provided by both professional academic advisors and faculty advisors, with roles and models varying across schools.

Faculty Advising

Faculty advising focuses on discipline specific mentorship within a student's major or program, including guidance on curricular choices, academic and scholarly development, and alignment of academic interests with longer term goals. Faculty advisors play an important complementary role within the broader advising ecosystem but may differ in scope, training, and availability from professional advisors.

Career Advising

Career advising helps students explore professional interests, develop career readiness skills, access experiential learning opportunities, engage with employers and alumni, and prepare for post graduate pathways. Career advising supports students' transition from academic experiences to professional outcomes.

This report focuses on academic advising and career advising as distinct but interconnected functions, recognizing the important role of faculty advising within the overall student advising experience.

As defined above, academic and career advising at George Washington University today is characterized by dedicated and committed staff operating within structurally constrained conditions, resulting in uneven student experiences across schools. Academic advising models, staffing levels, and expectations vary significantly across schools, producing disparities in access, responsiveness, and developmental depth. While several schools have implemented more structured approaches (such as required advising milestones, stable advisor assignments, or integrated first-year planning), others rely more heavily on optional, student-initiated interactions. At the same time, career advising is not consistently embedded within students' academic journeys, contributing to a disconnect between academic planning and career preparation. This variability has contributed to long-standing concerns among students and advisors alike about inconsistent quality, limited continuity, and an overreliance on transactional advising focused on registration and policy interpretation rather than mentorship and long-term academic and career development.

In addition, the structure and organization of advising roles within GW's advising ecosystem contribute to inconsistency in student experience. Within academic advising, the roles of professional academic advisors and faculty advisors are not consistently defined across schools, resulting in differing expectations related to scope of responsibility, preparation, and coordination. Students are often unclear about when to seek guidance from a faculty advisor versus a professional advisor, while faculty advisors themselves operate with varying assumptions about their advising role. More broadly, academic advising and career advising frequently function in parallel rather than as a clearly coordinated system, with limited shared guidance on role boundaries and handoff practices. Together, these conditions contribute to fragmented student pathways and underscore the need for clearer role definition, shared expectations, and stronger coordination across advising functions. Recent academic advising ratio analysis based on Fall 2023 census data underscores the capacity challenges facing

advising at scale. Advisor-to-student ratios vary widely by school and, in several cases, exceed levels typically associated with proactive, relationship-based advising. For example, actual advisee loads range from:

ACADEMIC ADVISING RATIOS
Based on Fall 2023 census data

School	Estimated Advisor-to-Student Ratio
ESIA	223:1
CCAS	300:1 This ratio is more than 300:1 when accounting for declared majors, double majors, and non-matriculated students.
GWSB	500:1 Peer mentors and other non-advisor support mechanisms are considered supplemental and not included in this ratio.
GWSPH	500:1 More than 500:1 when counting all student categories.

These levels significantly constrain advisors' ability to engage in sustained mentoring, early intervention, or integrated career conversations, reinforcing a transactional model driven by throughput and compliance rather than student development. Note that qualitative reports on advising in GWSB are largely positive, and imply that offering a wide range of supports – including generous use of peer mentors – can make up for a higher advisor to student ratio.

National best-practice reviews conducted through NACADA reinforce that many of these challenges are structural rather than individual. The 2018 NACADA consultation noted that advising at GW (particularly within CCAS) was largely transactional, lacked clearly articulated learning outcomes, and was not consistently positioned as a core teaching and learning function. The report emphasized the absence of shared expectations, uneven professional development, limited assessment of advising effectiveness, and insufficient staffing capacity as central impediments to reform. Importantly, NACADA framed these conditions as fixable through clearer institutional standards, improved advisor-to-student ratios, stronger integration of academic and career advising, and a shift toward developmental advising grounded in student learning outcomes.

More recent student engagement reinforces the urgency of addressing these issues. During a listening session in March 2026, SGA student leaders articulated concerns that advising often feels reactive, opaque, and disconnected from career and post-graduate planning, particularly early in students' academic journeys. Students emphasized the need for clearer pathways, earlier guidance, and more consistent coordination between academic advising, career services, and school-based resources. Taken together, the data and dialogue point to a clear set of opportunities: rebalance advisor capacity, reduce transactional friction, strengthen advisor preparation and coordination, and ensure that all students, regardless of their school, have equitable access to integrated academic and career guidance that supports both timely graduation and post-graduate success.

RAISE THE BAR: FIVE STRATEGIES FOR REIMAGINING ADVISING

The Working Group identified five strategies that define the institutional shifts required to deliver a more consistent, connected, and student-centered advising experience and elevate advising at GW to a nationally leading standard. These strategies describe clearly how advising must evolve in structure, support, and student experience to achieve sustained impact. The recommended tactics presented in the following section are aligned to and operationalize these five strategies.

A. **Restore Funding, Staffing, and Infrastructure to Previous Levels:** Sustained improvement in advising depends on addressing underlying structural barriers that limit effectiveness today. This includes restoring staffing levels to their pre-2021 levels, clarifying roles, strengthening professional pathways, improving data and technology systems, and establishing governance structures that support coordination and accountability. Restoring baseline capacity is not about expansion for its own sake, but about re-establishing the conditions necessary for advisors to do the work they are already expected to perform.

B. **Shift Advising from a Transactional Service to a Developmental Experience:** Advising at GW must move beyond a focus on course selection, compliance, and episodic interactions toward a model centered on student development, decision-making, and long-term success. This shift positions advising as a core educational function that helps students navigate academic choices, explore interests, build skills, and translate their experiences into post-graduate pathways. It also requires redefining success in advising not by efficiency alone, but by the quality and impact of student engagement.

C. **Build a Coherent and Navigable Advising Ecosystem:** Advising should function as a connected system rather than a collection of separate offices and resources. Achieving this requires stronger alignment across academic advising, career services, experiential learning, and co-curricular programs, while preserving the distinct expertise of each. The goal is not to merge roles, but to ensure coordination, clarity, and continuity so that students can easily access the right support at the right time without confusion or fragmentation.

D. **Embed Student Development Across the Academic Journey:** Advising must move beyond periodic support toward a more intentional model in which academic planning, career exploration, skill development, and post-graduate preparation are reinforced across the student experience. This requires a proactive and integrated approach in which academic advising and career advising work in concert, ensuring that course selection, degree pathways, major exploration, and future planning are consistently informed by students' evolving interests and goals. By embedding student development across the academic journey, GW can help students navigate their experience with greater clarity and connect their learning to meaningful future pathways.

E. **Ensure Equitable Access to Experiential Learning and Professional Pathways:** A defining feature of advising excellence is that students can access the experiences, relationships, and opportunities that connect academic preparation to future pathways. GW must move beyond an optional and uneven model by expanding access to paid, credit-bearing experiential learning opportunities, employer and practitioner engagement, alumni mentoring, and other career-connected experiences. This is essential to ensure that students can fully benefit from GW's academic and professional ecosystem. Achieving this will require close coordination among academic advisors, career advisors, faculty, and other student-support partners so

that experiential learning and career-connected opportunities are more visible and accessible across academic and post-graduate planning.

Together, these five strategies articulate how GW will move from a collection of strong but uneven advising practices to a coherent, nationally distinctive model of advising excellence.

RECOMMENDED TACTICS

To support effective execution, GW will require both near-term action to establish the foundational conditions, including action related to the staffing, infrastructure, governance, and coordination required for advising excellence; and longer-term actions to transform the student experience, including how advising, career preparation, and pathways will look different for students once those foundations are in place. Rather than advancing these efforts sequentially, the Working Group recommends a coordinated implementation approach in which foundational enablers and transformational accelerators progress in parallel, with timing informed by readiness, capacity, and impact. The recommended tactics below are therefore organized by strategy, illustrating how near-term and longer-term actions collectively advance each strategic objective and contribute to sustained improvement over time. Across both categories, the recommendations are intended to make it easier for students to access timely guidance, build sustained advising relationships, and connect their academic choices to their personal and professional goals.

STRATEGY A: RESTORE FUNDING, STAFFING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO PREVIOUS LEVELS

Restoring funding, staffing, and infrastructure requires more than adding positions back into the advising system. It first requires a clear understanding of where advising capacity is most strained, what caseloads and responsibilities advisors are currently carrying, and where role confusion or uneven expectations are limiting effectiveness. For that reason, the foundational enablers focus on assessing current capacity, modernizing staffing models, and clarifying advising roles and baseline expectations. These steps establish the basic conditions advisors need to meet current demands. The transformational accelerators then build on that foundation by improving coordination across academic and career advising and creating clearer professional pathways for advisors. Together, these tactics are intended to restore the capacity, clarity, and professional infrastructure needed so students can access more consistent, proactive, and relationship-centered advising.

Foundational Enablers

1. **Improve advising responsiveness and quality through an assessment of current capabilities and the development of a near-term improvement plan** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. GW should identify the academic and career advising units experiencing the greatest capacity strain and determine where immediate staffing, caseload rebalancing, or role clarification is needed. This assessment should examine advisor-to-student ratios, actual caseloads, student demand, appointment availability, advisor responsibilities, and the volume of transactional tasks that limit time for developmental advising. Based on this analysis, GW should develop a near-term staffing stabilization plan that prioritizes the areas of greatest need, clarifies role expectations, and identifies opportunities to rebalance advising responsibilities where possible. This action would provide a concrete first step toward restoring advisor capacity and ensuring that future investments are targeted, evidence-based, and aligned with the goal of delivering more proactive, relationship-centered advising. By addressing advisor capacity constraints, GW can improve access to advising, reduce wait times, and ensure students receive timely support through critical points in their academic and career journeys.

2. **Modernize staffing models** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. GW should define advisor caseload expectations by aligning with a high-touch, proactive advising experience and differentiated by student population and advising model. For academic advising, this includes establishing sustainable caseload expectations informed by NACADA principles, enabling advisors to engage in developmental advising, degree planning, and proactive student support rather than primarily transactional work. For career advising, GW's current staffing capacity is structurally insufficient to meet student needs; with only four career counselors serving the entire undergraduate population, the university cannot deliver consistent, proactive, and developmentally focused guidance at scale. Meaningful expansion of career advising staff is required to move beyond reactive, transaction-based support toward a sustained, relationship-centered model that improves student outcomes. This includes moving academic advising toward a 150:1 student-to-advisor ratio and career coaching toward a 300:1 student-to-coach ratio. Working Group participants cautioned against rigid, one-size-fits-all ratios; instead the Advising Excellence Committee should recommend appropriate ranges and conditions and develop a university-wide staffing plan outlining recommended roles and areas of growth.
3. **Clarify advising roles, naming, and baseline expectations** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. GW should clearly define advising roles within academic advising structures, including distinctions among professional academic advisors and faculty advisors, by establishing more distinct naming conventions and expectations for each role. Clarified role definitions would help students better understand where to seek different types of guidance and support more effective coordination among advisors. In addition, GW should establish shared expectations and provide accessible training and resources for all individuals serving in advising roles, both faculty and professional. Together, these steps would create a more consistent advising experience across all schools while preserving the distinct and complementary contributions of professional advisors and faculty.

Transformational Accelerators

4. **Provide guidance for better coordination** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. GW should provide clear guidance and models to strengthen coordination across academic and career advising, while maintaining clear and distinct role boundaries. This includes identifying effective approaches, such as embedded career specialists and career-aware academic advising, that help students experience advising as a more integrated and navigable system. Coordination should focus on clarifying handoffs, shared touchpoints, and communication practices so that students receive timely, consistent support without being referred from office to office without clear guidance. Coordination should not include blending academic advisor and career coach roles; experience at other institutions suggest that merging functions can lead to role dilution, burnout, and reduced effectiveness. The Working Group therefore emphasized coordination across advising functions without merging roles, ensuring students experience a more cohesive system while preserving specialized expertise.
5. **Establish clear professional pathways** *(Academic Advising)* with defined job families, opportunities for specialization, and consistent training in advising pedagogy and student development. The Working Group heard repeatedly that advisor turnover, inconsistent preparation, and limited professional growth opportunities undermine both student experience and institutional effectiveness. Advisors are expected to perform increasingly complex mentoring, interpret evolving curricular pathways, and support diverse student populations, but these expectations are not consistently matched with role clarity, training, or advancement opportunities. Establishing clear professional pathways is essential to strengthening advisor

capacity, retention, and credibility. In some areas of the university, there are already models that demonstrate elements of this structure. For example, within CCAS academic advising pods, tiered roles such as advisor, senior advisor, and assistant director create a clearer pathway for progression, with leadership roles often emerging from within the advising ranks. This type of structure provides a useful internal example that could inform broader institutional alignment. Building on and adapting these models where appropriate would help create more consistent pathways across schools while preserving flexibility for different advising contexts.

STRATEGY B: SHIFT ADVISING FROM A TRANSACTIONAL SERVICE TO A DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERIENCE

Shifting advising from a transactional service to a developmental experience depends on reducing the administrative friction that currently limits advisors' ability to engage students in deeper planning, reflection, and decision-making. The foundational enablers in this section focus on streamlining routine processes and creating shared infrastructure so advisors are not forced to spend disproportionate time navigating disconnected systems, duplicative workflows, or manual administrative tasks. These changes are necessary to protect advisor time for the work that requires judgment, context, and relationship. The transformational accelerator then elevates data and system integration from a technical improvement to a core condition for advising excellence, recognizing that fragmented information makes it harder for students to receive coordinated guidance and for advisors to provide proactive and personalized support.

Foundational Enablers

6. **Reduce transactional workload through automation, standardized business processes and roles, and centralized workflows for common activities such as transfer credit and major changes** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. Working Group members consistently identified routine administrative tasks as the primary barrier preventing advisors from engaging in meaningful mentoring and developmental conversations with students. These tasks consume disproportionate advisor capacity and create frustration for students when processes are slow or opaque. The goal is not to eliminate human oversight, but to ensure that advisor time is reserved for work that requires judgment, context, and relationship, allowing advising to move beyond transactional interactions toward sustained, student-centered relationships. For students, this would create clearer processes, reduce administrative friction, and allow advisors to spend more time on personalized guidance, academic planning, and career preparation.
7. **Implement shared advising infrastructure and integrated data governance across units** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. The Working Group heard consistently that effective advising is constrained not by lack of effort or information, but by fragmented systems and data. Advisors described difficulty supporting students without access to a holistic view of their academic, experiential, and career engagement, while students expressed frustration with retelling their story and navigating disconnected platforms for scheduling, notes, follow-ups, and documentation. A seamless student experience requires unified platforms for advising coordination, paired with integrated data across offices (e.g., advising, career services, experiential learning, and institutional research) and common advising tools for scheduling, shared notes, and case management that is governed by shared definitions and standards to ensure trust, clarity, and effective collaboration. These platforms should also incorporate skills mapping and career pathway visualization capabilities to support real-time, developmentally focused advising conversations, driven by the goal to connect academic decisions to evolving career trajectories.

Transformational Accelerators

8. **Treat data upgrades and system integration as a requirement** *(Academic & Career Advising)* for advising excellence, not a downstream task. The Working Group repeatedly emphasized that advising reform cannot succeed if data integration is deferred or treated as a technical afterthought. Fragmented systems undermine trust, limit insight, and force advisors to compensate manually for institutional shortcomings. Data integration is framed not as an analytics exercise, but as essential infrastructure for equitable, proactive advising.

STRATEGY C: BUILD A COHERENT AND NAVIGABLE ADVISING ECOSYSTEM

Building a coherent and navigable advising ecosystem requires both shared stewardship and a clearer understanding of what students should be able to access, experience, and achieve. The foundational enablers in this section focus on creating the structures needed to coordinate advising across GW's decentralized environment, including a standing governance mechanism and a shared framework for academic and career advising. These steps provide the continuity, accountability, and common language needed to align future decisions about staffing, technology, training, and programming. The transformational accelerators then extend that shared framework into the academic experience itself by helping faculty, advisors, and students identify the competencies students develop through coursework, connect those competencies to artifacts and labor-market language, and help students better articulate what they are learning and how it connects to future pathways.

Foundational Enablers

9. **Establish a cross-functional Advising Excellence Committee to provide ongoing coordination, shared accountability, and a mechanism for adapting leading practices to GW's academic environment** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. Across the Working Group discussions, a consistent theme emerged: GW possesses strong advising practices, but those practices are uneven, siloed, and difficult to sustain at scale. As a result, the student experience can vary significantly across schools and programs. Participants emphasized the need for a durable governance mechanism that can steward an integrated advising model over time. A standing Advising Excellence Committee would provide continuity, shared accountability, and a forum for translating national best practices into approaches that fit GW's decentralized academic structure. The committee would include representation from academic advising, career services, experiential learning, faculty leadership, enrollment, student affairs, and institutional research, and would be charged with synthesizing evidence from national models (e.g., NACADA-informed practices, AAU peers) and adapting them into guidance that departments and schools can implement in ways aligned with their curricula, accreditation requirements, and student populations. The committee would also serve as a clearinghouse for internal best practices, identifying models already working well within GW and supporting their adaptation elsewhere. The committee would be responsible for revisiting recommendations over time, assessing progress, and adjusting guidance as institutional conditions, student expectations, and labor-market dynamics evolve. Ultimately, the committee's goal would be to help ensure a more consistent, coordinated, and high-quality advising experience for all GW students.
10. **Establish a shared vision, mission, and goals for academic and career advising at GW** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. The Working Group identified the absence of a clearly defined and consistently understood framework for academic and career advising as a barrier to coordination, accountability, and long-term improvement. GW should develop a shared advising framework grounded in input from students, staff, faculty, and advisors across schools. This framework

should clarify what advising is intended to achieve, how academic and career advising should work together, and what students should experience as a result. It should also be directly aligned with GW's commitment to preparing students for meaningful first post-graduate opportunities and equipping them with the adaptability, self-awareness, and durable competencies needed to sustain success across a lifetime of evolving careers. Establishing this shared foundation would provide common language for advising excellence and ensure that future decisions about staffing, technology, training, and programming are connected to a coherent institutional purpose.

Transformational Accelerators

11. **Initiate a dialogue with faculty, department by department, around transferable skills/competencies/knowledge** *(Academic & Career Advising)* that students acquire through general education and major courses and provide resources and coordination support for faculty connecting academic inquiry with career exploration. This dialogue would surface discipline-specific interpretations of transferable competencies (e.g., critical thinking, analysis, communication) and make them visible to students and advisors in a shared, faculty-informed framework (see cla.umn.edu/undergraduate-students/cla-core-competencies as an example).
12. **Develop a faculty institute to integrate career-readiness competencies into the curriculum** *(Academic & Career Advising)* to embed shared advising outcomes within the academic experience, GW should develop a faculty-focused program modeled on the Course Design Institute (CDI) that supports instructors in integrating career-readiness competencies into their courses. While students develop valuable skills through coursework, these competencies are often implicit and difficult to translate into professional contexts. This program would provide faculty with structured support to align course objectives with defined competencies, design assignments that develop and demonstrate those skills, and make them explicit to students. As a result, students would be better equipped to articulate their academic experiences in resumes, portfolios, and professional platforms such as LinkedIn. Like CDI, the program would emphasize practical course design, peer collaboration, and cross-disciplinary engagement. To reinforce and scale this work, GW could also establish a faculty recognition or award program highlighting exemplary models of integrating career-readiness competencies into the curriculum. This would elevate effective practices, incentivize innovation in course design, and provide visible examples that other faculty can adapt across disciplines. Together, these efforts ensure that the competency framework is not only defined, but actively reinforced within the classroom, strengthening the connection between academic learning and career readiness.
13. **Connect competencies to coursework, student artifacts, and labor-market data** *(Career Advising)* so students can better articulate the value of their academic experiences. GW should integrate the competencies catalog into career courses, modules, and related assignments to help students identify the skills they are developing through academic work and connect those skills to concrete artifacts such as papers, projects, presentations, research, and other course-based work. This would allow students to build clearer narratives about their academic experiences and better explain their preparation in resumes, interviews, portfolios, and advising conversations. To strengthen this connection further, competencies should also be linked to credible labor-market data through platforms such as Lightcast/Burning Glass or Forage, with consideration of platforms that unify competency mapping, labor-market data, and student-facing pathway visualization to ensure these connections are scalable, continuously updated, and consistently applied across programs. These tools should support, not replace, advisor and faculty guidance by providing shared language and up-to-date signals that make academic learning more visible, relevant, and actionable for students.

14. **Develop a digital career & competency portfolio** *(Career Advising)* that students and academic departments can adopt to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and capabilities evidenced by academic and co-curricular artifacts. Students have repeatedly described difficulty translating their GW experiences (e.g., courses, research, leadership, internships) into coherent narratives for employers and graduate programs. Portfolios will explicitly support resume development and help students to articulate their experience in interviews. GW can use micro-credentials to recognize accomplishments documented in portfolios. However, portfolio adoption should be faculty-led and discipline-appropriate, with centrally supported tools available, reflecting the Working Group's strong consensus that portfolios must emerge from academic contexts rather than be imposed as a centralized requirement.

STRATEGY D: EMBED STUDENT DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE ACADEMIC JOURNEY

Embedding student development across the academic journey requires more than introducing career support at isolated points in a student's time at GW. It requires a more intentional sequence of academic planning, career exploration, reflection, and skill development that begins early and is reinforced over time. The foundational enablers in this section focus on creating a stronger common starting point through orientation, first-year programming, and early opportunities for students to identify their interests, values, and goals. The transformational accelerators then build on that early foundation by creating more structured pathways for continued career development, internship preparation, and pre-professional planning. These pathways should be supported by technology that enables students to explore and refine career interests, view adjacent pathways, and understand how academic choices influence evolving opportunities over time. Together, these tactics are intended to help all students move through GW with greater clarity, connect academic choices to longer-term goals, and engage in future planning before key decisions become urgent or unevenly supported.

Foundational Enablers

15. **Embed shared career goals across the first-year student experience** *(Career Advising)*. Integrate core competency and career-readiness milestones into existing school-specific orientation and first-year experience (FYE) courses, while preserving each school's unique academic focus. The Working Group found that first-year experience courses vary in how they are staffed, taught, and structured, while many students arrive at GW with limited understanding of how to navigate career resources, articulate their interests, or connect early academic choices to longer-term goals. At the same time, optional career programming often results in uneven participation, underscoring the need for a more structured and universal approach to early academic and career exploration. To address this, GW should create a more consistent first-year experience that includes clearer expectations for instructors, aligned training and curriculum, and a required orientation module on career development and campus resources. This module should include a career assessment tool to help students begin identifying their interests, values, and skills. Together, these efforts would establish a common starting point for all students, normalize career reflection as part of the academic journey, and ensure that first-year programming more reliably supports students' transition to GW, early academic exploration, career awareness, and long-term planning.
16. **Address the concepts of career purpose and life design, and embed career exploration early** *(Career Advising)*, including within orientation activities, assignments in FYE courses, and credential-bearing short micro experiences during sophomore year linked to defined

competencies. This recommendation extends early exposure beyond orientation by embedding career purpose, life design, and exploration into existing curricular structures, particularly FYE courses and short, competency-linked micro experiences in the sophomore year. These experiences would be intentionally designed to help students test interests, reflect on learning, and begin translating academic work into emerging professional narratives without requiring immediate commitment to a specific career path.

Transformational Accelerators

17. **Establish a scalable, credit-bearing career pathway framework** *(Career Advising)* that ensures all students have access to structured career development experiences, including preparation for and participation in paid internships, with schools determining how requirements are met based on disciplinary context and accreditation constraints. The Working Group aligned around the need for a more structured, equitable approach to career preparation, noting that students who already know how to navigate internships and networks benefit disproportionately from optional models. A credit-bearing framework signals institutional priority, encourages student engagement, and allows career development to be integrated into the academic experience in discipline-appropriate ways rather than positioned as co-curricular or peripheral.
18. **Improve pre-professional advising through clear pathways, early guidance, and coordinated support** *(Career Advising)*. GW should strengthen pre-professional advising by establishing clearer, more consistent pathways for students pursuing fields with defined post-graduate requirements (e.g., health professions, law, teaching, public service, and other licensure- or application-driven fields). This includes providing earlier and more proactive guidance on course sequencing, experiential expectations, milestone planning, and preparation timelines; clarifying roles and handoffs between academic advisors, pre-professional advisors, and career services; and ensuring that advising for these pathways is integrated into the broader advising ecosystem rather than operating as an isolated or informal overlay.

STRATEGY E: ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS

Ensuring equitable access to experiential learning and professional pathways requires addressing the practical barriers that shape whether students can participate in internships, applied learning, and career-building experiences in the first place. The foundational enablers in this section focus on expanding access to experiential pathways and creating more flexible academic structures so that participation is not limited by scheduling constraints, financial pressures, or uneven preparation. The transformational accelerators then build on that access by moving GW toward a more ambitious model in which paid internships, employer and practitioner engagement, and alumni mentoring become more consistently available and more intentionally connected to students' academic preparation. Together, these tactics are intended to ensure that students can access and benefit from experiential learning and professional pathways, rather than having participation depend on informal networks or a student's ability to navigate opportunities independently.

Foundational Enablers

19. **Increase access to experiential pathways** *(Career Advising)*; scaling internship prep courses; expanding access to paid on-campus, community-based, and employer-sponsored internships; expanding paid on-campus or community-based internships; and enabling flexible credit structures. This recommendation focuses on expanding access by scaling preparatory coursework, growing paid opportunities on campus and in the community, and offering flexible

credit structures that reduce friction between academics and experiential engagement. Emphasis is placed on readiness and inclusion, ensuring that experiential pathways are feasible for students with work, family, or visa constraints, as well as transfer, international, and high-financial-need students.

20. **Enable more flexible academic scheduling to support internships and co-curricular engagement** *(Academic & Career Advising)*. The Working Group discussed academic scheduling as a key structural factor shaping students' ability to participate in internships, DC-based experiences, and co-curricular programming. As part of this, the group explored the idea of identifying a consistent no-class time block in the late afternoon (e.g., 4:00–5:00 p.m.) to create dedicated space for engagement opportunities across schools. The group also considered a more structured four-day academic schedule (e.g., no classes on Fridays), but noted significant feasibility challenges, including accreditation requirements, variation across academic programs, and broader logistical complexity. As an alternative, the Working Group discussed more flexible approaches, including leveraging tools such as CourseDog to enable students to build customized schedules that better accommodate internships and experiential learning. Together, these approaches reflect potential pathways to expand access to DC-based opportunities while maintaining flexibility across academic programs.

Transformational Accelerators

21. **Move toward the expectation that all students will participate in paid internships** *(Career Advising)*, supported through a mix of institutional funding, external partnerships, and revenue-generating career coursework. Students and parents increasingly view paid internships as a baseline expectation. The Working Group discussed this as a long-term directional goal rather than an immediate mandate, emphasizing the need to build supporting infrastructure and funding models over time. This aspiration could be supported over time through a diversified funding approach, including targeted central investment, employer- and alumni-supported internship partnerships, philanthropic funding for access and equity, and selectively revenue-generating, credit-bearing career coursework.
22. **Enhance employer and practitioner engagement** *(Career Advising)* through classroom involvement, simulations, project-based learning, and paid internship partnerships that connect academic preparation to professional pathways. GW should expand opportunities for students to engage directly with employers, alumni, practitioners, and community partners through course-based projects, applied simulations, guest lectures, site visits, industry-informed assignments, and structured internship partnerships. These experiences would help students see how academic knowledge is applied in professional settings, practice career-relevant skills, build networks, and better understand the range of pathways connected to their fields of study. This engagement should complement, not replace, disciplinary learning by grounding career exploration in rigorous academic contexts and ensuring that students can connect what they learn in the classroom to future opportunities.
23. **Strategically integrate alumni as a complementary source of mentoring and career-informed support** *(Career Advising)*, particularly to help students explore pathways, reflect on professional trajectories, and translate academic experiences into post-graduate outcomes. A clearly articulated core advising experience would set expectations for students and families, establish a shared understanding across schools, and provide a reference point for evaluating whether advising structures, partnerships, and resources are aligned with institutional values.

INNOVATION PILOTS: AI-ASSISTED TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED ADVISING SUPPORT

The Working Group also considered how AI-assisted tools and other technology-enabled supports could advance the five strategies outlined above by reducing administrative friction, improving access to routine information, and making the advising ecosystem and appointment scheduling easier for students to navigate. As part of this discussion, the group reviewed demonstrations from Ellucian and CollegeVine, which illustrated different approaches to advising technology, student support platforms, and AI-enabled triage and mapping skills to career outcomes. These demonstrations helped the group consider where technology could support advising workflows, improve student navigation, reduce repetitive administrative tasks, and inform the alignment of academic offerings to worksforce needs, while also reinforcing the importance of keeping human advising at the center of the student experience.

The Working Group's general consensus was that AI-assisted tools can play a useful role in supporting academic and career advising when they are targeted to clear, routine, and high-volume needs. For example, chatbots or similar tools could help students identify the appropriate advisor or office, navigate DegreeMAP, schedule appointments, and receive answers to frequently asked questions. These tools may also expand access to basic advising information outside traditional business hours and help reduce the administrative friction that often prevents advisors from spending more time on relational and developmental work.

For these reasons, the Working Group recommends that GW explore AI-assisted advising tools through carefully designed pilots rather than broad implementation. One approach would be to carefully monitor the efficacy and impact of AI-enabled triage tools that can handle high-volume routine questions, improve student navigation, and reduce transactional workload. A second approach would be to pilot student-centered, student-built advising tools, such as a future version of "BobBot," to explore where these tools can be most useful and reflective of GW's culture and needs. These pilots should focus on narrow use cases, include clear success criteria, operate within established data and privacy guardrails, and include appropriate training for advisors and staff. They should also include explicit pathways for redirecting students to human advisors when questions involve academic planning, degree interpretation, personal circumstances, or more complex decision-making.

Used in this way, AI-assisted tools and advising technologies can support the broader advising reform agenda without becoming another disconnected layer of support. The goal should be to improve student navigation, reduce transactional burden, and strengthen the relationship-centered advising model recommended by the Working Group.

CONCLUSION

This report reflects the Working Group's shared conviction that improving student success, retention, and post-graduate outcomes at GW requires a deliberate shift from fragmented, transactional advising toward a coherent, integrated model of advising excellence. The strategies and tactics presented here recognize that sustained progress depends on aligning people, processes, data, and tools around a clearly defined core advising experience and a multi-year developmental pathway for students.

At the heart of this work is a commitment to relationship-centered advising: advisors and faculty equipped with the capacity, clarity, and infrastructure to serve as mentors who help students navigate their curriculum, articulate their competencies, and translate their GW experience into meaningful

pathways beyond graduation. Implemented thoughtfully and in phases, these recommendations position GW to raise the bar for advising to a nationally distinctive level, one that advances equity, strengthens institutional competitiveness, and delivers on the university's educational mission by treating advising not as administrative compliance, but as a core, high-impact teaching and learning function.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: NACADA Report University-Wide Recommendations

The Academic and Career Advising Working Group reviewed the Academic Advising Program Review Report submitted by the NACADA Consultation Team to the Columbian College of Arts and Science at GW on June 7, 2018. Below is an excerpt of the appendix from the report summarizing the university-wide recommendations.

It is recommended that the entire GWU community understand and accept a common vision, mission, values goals, and outcomes for the advising system.

- Designate a leader for university academic advising initiatives and coordination across colleges in the Provost's Office – as this type of coordination and leadership cannot be an "add-on" responsibility to an existing leadership position. Both consultants, an Associate Provost, Emerita and a current Assistant Provost had or have the coordination of university- wide advising as a primary responsibility.
- Vet a shared advising Vision, Mission, Values, Goals and SLO's with the campus-wide leadership (college deans, student life and enrollment management) and clearly articulate that advising falls under the teaching/learning mission of the institution. A proposed shared advising syllabus should be a part of the document.
- Submit a Faculty resolution through established faculty governance structures that is in support of academic advising/mentoring as teaching/learning and that includes a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of advisors – both faculty advisors and professional advisors. In many institutions, faculty advisors serve as "mentors in the discipline" and professional advisors serve as students' "guides and navigators" for the university and student experience. Academic advising should not be considered "service." The learning/student focused paradigm for advising creates a framework for this cultural shift.
- Assist colleges in the development of specific mission, goals and learning outcomes that support the shared university V, M, G, V, O's but also support the colleges' unique curricula, faculty and student experiences.
- Recognize and reward units and individuals who demonstrate buy-in and who create unit specific syllabi that complement the shared document.
- Create a shared advisor professional development program that represents the "core" knowledge that all GWU advisors should have to impact student persistence and success.

Again, we believe that CCAS can strategically change the advising culture in the college and serve as a best practice model, however, there will be some issues that cannot be resolved without university-wide buy-in to a shared advising mission and shared goals along with a collaborative effort to standardize certain policies and processes that impact academic advising and the student experience. ***We recognize that the above recommendations are outside the scope of this program review.***

Appendix 2: Ellucian Demonstration

The Working Group received a demonstration from Ellucian. Ellucian delivers GW's Banner platform, including DegreeMAP, financial aid, and related student systems. The demonstration was intended to help the group understand what technology capabilities are currently available or on the roadmap, particularly as they relate to the Working Group's emerging recommendations around integrated academic and career advising, career readiness, and skills mapping.

OVERVIEW OF CAPABILITIES

The central focus of the demonstration was Ellucian's Journey platform, which uses AI to connect academic coursework to career pathways through skills mapping. The system scans course catalogs, learning outcomes, and related data within the student information system and maps them to labor market data (via Lightcast) to create a unified taxonomy linking courses, skills, and career outcomes.

This enables:

- Automated mapping of curricular content to workforce-relevant skills
- A consistent skills framework across academic programs
- Faculty review and refinement of AI-generated mappings (rather than manual creation from scratch)

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

From a student perspective, the platform provides a personalized, visual representation of skill development and career pathways. Students can:

- See which skills they have developed through coursework
- Explore adjacent skills and potential career paths
- View indicative salary ranges and job demand aligned to those skills
- Update career interests and see real-time changes to their pathway

This represents a shift from a transactional course-planning model to a more career-connected academic experience.

FACULTY AND INSTITUTIONAL VIEWS

Faculty are prompted to review and refine suggested skill mappings for their courses, while institutional leaders can view aggregate data showing skill gaps relative to workforce demand.

Additional capabilities discussed included:

- Workflow automation for administrative processes (e.g., forms, approvals)
- Aggregated student data views to support early alerts and advising preparation

WORKING GROUP DISCUSSION

Key themes from the discussion included:

- **Prioritizing foundational improvements.** Members emphasized that immediate needs include reducing administrative burden, improving scheduling systems, and strengthening advisor capacity before pursuing more advanced AI-enabled tools.
- **Maintaining relationship-centered advising.** A consistent concern was that advising is fundamentally relational and developmental, and that technology should support–rather than replace–advisor-student interactions.
- **Value of skills translation, when appropriately mediated.** While there was interest in helping students connect academic learning to career outcomes, members noted that interpretation and translation (often facilitated by academic advisors or career services) remain critical.
- **Strong interest in back-end efficiency gains.** There was broader support for using AI to automate administrative tasks and provide better data visibility to advisors, enabling them to spend more time on high-value interactions with students.
- **Data privacy considerations.** Questions were raised regarding data governance and the handling of student and curricular data within vendor platforms.

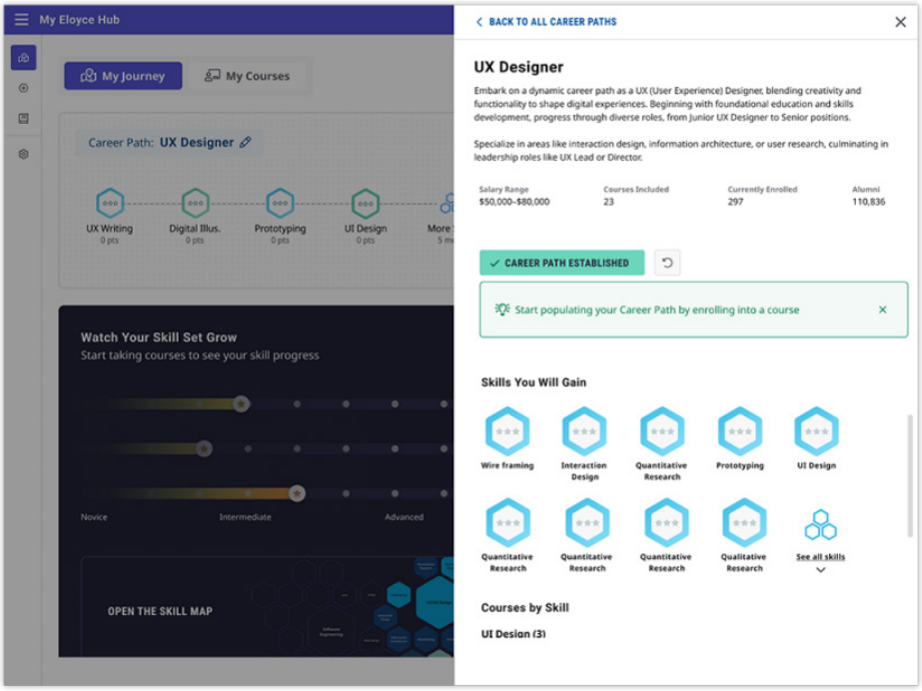
Overall, the demonstration highlighted the potential of AI-enabled systems to improve data integration and career visibility, while reinforcing the importance of sequencing technology investments after foundational advising improvements.

Figure 1. AI Enabled Skills Mapping and Career Path Exploration (Ellucian Journey)

This image illustrates a skills-based visualization of a selected career pathway (UX/UI Designer), showing how individual competencies (e.g., prototyping, user research, wireframing) are connected to adjacent skill areas and related fields. The interface enables students to explore how their academic experiences map to broader skill clusters and alternative career pathway.

Figure 2. Career Pathway Detail and Skill Progression View (Ellucian Journey)

This image highlights a career pathway detail page for a UX Designer, including an overview of the role, associated skills, and example salary range. The interface also displays skill development areas and connects them to relevant coursework, illustrating how students can track progress and build competencies aligned with a selected career path.



Appendix 3: CollegeVine Demonstration

The Working Group also received a demonstration from CollegeVine, an AI platform that deploys "AI agents" to support student services, including advising-related functions. CollegeVine is used by over 300 colleges and universities to deploy AI agents across campus operations. GW's existing relationship with CollegeVine began in undergraduate admissions and had expanded to include transcript processing and planning for a Student Services Hub AI agent.

OVERVIEW OF CAPABILITIES

CollegeVine's platform is centered on AI agents that function as additional virtual staff members, capable of:

- Responding to student questions across phone, text, email, and chat
- Operating 24/7 and in multiple languages
- Performing actions such as scheduling appointments or sending resources
- Conducting proactive outreach based on defined triggers (e.g., missed deadlines)

Unlike traditional chatbots, these agents can be event-triggered and action-oriented, such as a student's missed housing form or selection for financial aid verification, rather than solely reactive.

DEMONSTRATED USE CASES

The live demonstration illustrated several core functions:

- Answering general questions and sending relevant links
- Scheduling advising appointments based on availability
- Supporting multilingual interactions in real time
- Providing summaries of conversations
- Sharing career-related information (e.g., events, employer presence)

The system is trained on institutional knowledge bases (websites, documents, and staff inputs) and can escalate conversations to human staff when needed.

Typical use cases at peer institutions include:

- After-hours support for routine questions
- Automated outreach to students who have not engaged with advising or career services
- Collection of student feedback or post-graduation data
- Assistance with high-volume administrative processes

WORKING GROUP DISCUSSION

The demonstration prompted a range of perspectives:

- **Clear value for routine, logistical support.** Members noted that AI agents could improve access to basic information (e.g., how to schedule appointments, where to find resources), particularly outside business hours.
- **Concerns about substitution for human engagement.** There was significant concern that students, particularly those less likely to seek help, may rely on AI interactions instead of engaging with advisors, potentially limiting deeper developmental conversations.
- **Opportunity for proactive outreach.** Members expressed interest in outbound capabilities (e.g., nudging students who have not engaged), particularly as a way to extend advisor reach between appointments.
- **Limitations for complex or personalized advising.** Participants emphasized that many advising scenarios require context, judgment, and nuance that AI cannot fully replicate, particularly when students are unsure what questions to ask.
- **Importance of clear boundaries and guardrails.** There was broad agreement that, if implemented, AI tools would need clearly defined use cases, escalation pathways to human advisors, and strong quality controls to prevent misinformation.
- **Need for student validation.** Members noted the importance of understanding student preferences directly before adopting AI-driven advising tools at scale.

Overall, the discussion reinforced that AI agents may be most valuable in reducing administrative friction and expanding access to basic information, provided they are carefully scoped and do not replace core advising relationships.

Appendix 4: Working Group Members and Co-Authors

The Academic and Career Advising Working Group included representatives from across GW schools, departments, and administrative units, bringing a broad range of perspectives to this work. This report would not have been possible without the group's sustained engagement, thoughtful input, and commitment over a seven-month span during the 2025–2026 academic year.

The recommendations and analysis presented above were directly shaped by the perspectives, feedback, and expertise shared throughout the process. While individual members brought different viewpoints and priorities to the discussion, the report reflects the Working Group's collective effort to identify opportunities to strengthen academic and career advising at GW and better support students throughout their educational and professional journeys.

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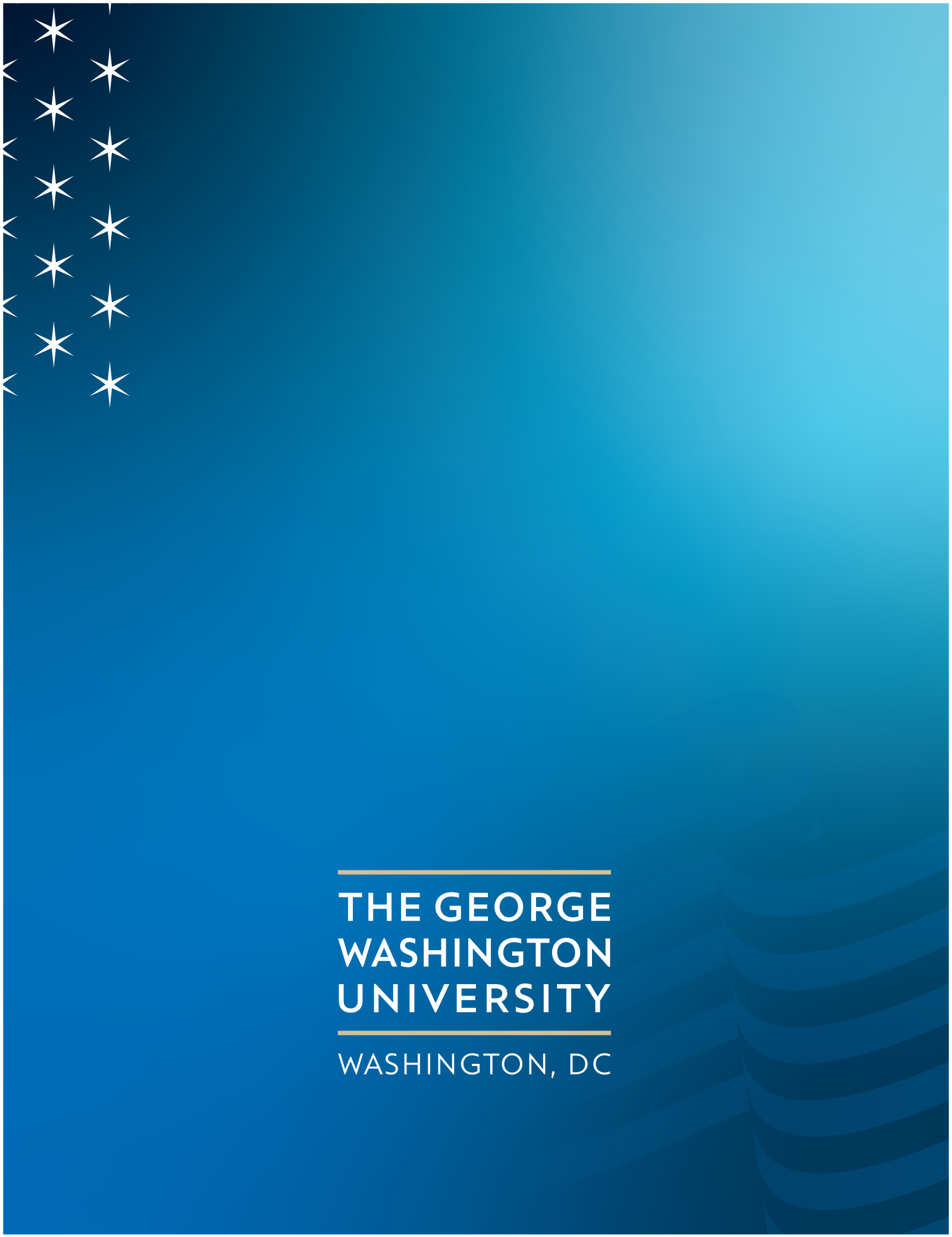
**Names and titles reflect those in place at the time of the Working Group's work.*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